

A Home and Travel Security Guide

Incidents of attempted harm to judges or their family members away from the courthouse are probably rare. Nonetheless, those incidents have been serious enough and have received enough publicity to warrant taking security precautions. It is also worthwhile to develop attitudes and activities that minimize concern for personal safety.

Stories of families that will not be intimidated by threats are encouraging. Some say that the one thing they would emphasize is the importance of good communications in the family generally. If a problem should arise for anyone, they will be able to bring it up because good communication lines are open. Judges and their families can take safety precautions, but still thoroughly enjoy their lives. Here is an area where considering the bigger picture and investing time to make other areas of public family life manageable can ease security challenges.

Trainers for the National Sheriff's Association and California Highway Patrol encourage judges to learn all they can about the patterns of individuals who have harmed public figures or buildings. Typically these persons had lost everything that matters to them. Losing their dignity was the last straw. A respectful attitude on the part of a judge who is deciding child custody, criminal sentencing, or other emotional issues can prevent many of the threats that are made to judges and their families.

Former National Center for State Courts President Roger Warren points to an excellent booklet produced for federal courts by the U.S. Department of Justice U.S. Marshals Service, [Personal Security Handbook: How You and Your Family Can Minimize Risks to Personal Safety](#). We quote a few lines:

"The potential danger associated with the life of a public official...is an unpleasant topic of conversation among family and friends. But avoiding the subject does not lessen the potential for harm."

"Let's put this matter of 'threats' in perspective. The potential for violence to you or your family is an important subject. When the rare incidents of assaults on public officials or attempts at intimidation do occur, they attract tremendous attention from the news media and, as a result, violence in one form or another seems to be everywhere. It is not! Nevertheless, you need to be informed, and to take sensible precautions—like discussing the matter with your family members."

"As a practical matter, you are hundreds of times more likely to be injured from a fall at home or on the tennis court or to be killed in an automobile accident than to ever be involved in a work-related assault or hostage situation. The chances of you or your family becoming victims of that sort are very slight—and you can reduce the risk even further."

Risks truly can be reduced by devising a security plan unique to one's own family. The suggestions that follow would be helpful to anyone, not just to people in public life. Before entering public life, many new judges and their families are already following several of the precautions listed. JFI is pleased to share here the security strategies of those who are managing to avoid problems and/or stay calm in crises. It may not be easy to decide what security precautions to take or what attitudes to adopt that will help everyone in the family. This list can help each judicial family identify some ways of approaching a custom-tailored security plan.

The Judicial Family Institute has compiled home security ideas from various sources. Many measures apply to any families, not just judges' families. Countless judges and their family members have shared the ideas listed below. They also report using many of the techniques advocated by experts in law enforcement. Indiana State Police Officers have suggested many ideas for safety at home and while traveling. Their suggestions and those from the National Judicial College are also included.

It is beneficial to make your own security plan with the help of local law enforcement, considering the perspectives suggested below. The goal is preparation, not paranoia. Some of the measures or attitudes shared below may not be appropriate in your community or circumstances, but are shared for your consideration.

Perspective

- Remembering that people and families like yours keep democratic principles and the rule of law alive through courage, commitment, and confidence. They will not be intimidated.
- Drawing a comparison to traffic safety issues and the many automobile accidents reported daily is suggested by former Indiana Judge's Association President Paul Mathias. We don't lose confidence or stop driving.
- Being alert and taking precautions without catastrophizing about what might happen.
- Determining to keep calm and using logic if threatened or placed in a dangerous situation.
- Realizing a judge may not get as many threats as an attorney, prosecutor, corporate head, university president, member of the clergy, social worker, psychiatrist, or person in another profession.
- Being aware that threats and extra needs for security do not occur in a vacuum. Families in public life thrive when they minimize other sources of stress and maximize other sources of security.

Planning

- Chatting with other judges and their spouses or families to learn how they function with confidence without being preoccupied with security.
- Teaching your family what you have learned about judicial security with consideration for ages and individual needs.
- Getting the facts on incidents of actual harm to judges or their families in your area.
- Letting assigned law enforcement officials do a security analysis of your home.
- Having a plan if taken hostage.
- Having a fire safety plan for your home.
- Not keeping or carrying a weapon unless it is in proper working condition and you [and your family] have been trained in its proper use. Keeping skills sharp by practicing frequently. A

policeman's wife accidentally shot her husband when he arrived home unexpectedly in the middle of the night without turning on the lights. A photographer's child accidentally killed his father. Since judge's families are not immune from accidents, instructing the whole household about weapon safety is smart.

- Instructing family members not to trust strangers.
- Making sure state or territory, county, and local police and local fire departments know where you live.
- Talking with people in your faith community about resources and attitudes.
- Counseling with professionals who have special expertise in helping judges and their households.

Home Security Strategies

- Using a home security system. The signal from your home should feed into an answering service capable of processing your call quickly. Some systems cause unnecessary delays because they receive too many other calls or excessive other accounts such as physicians' answering services. There are audible or silent duress alarms available. Consult ranking services and local experts.
- Checking your newest state or territory laws on keeping your home address off the Internet.
- Seeing the newest Judicial Family Institute (JFI) website articles on cybersecurity tips.
- Before answering the door, using an intercom or webcam system to identify who is there.
- Before answering the door, looking through a peephole or glass to see who is there.
- Avoiding opening your door to a stranger.
- Avoiding opening your door to a delivery person unless you are expecting a package that needs a signature & they call or text you before ringing your doorbell.
- Posting a sign near your front door: "Do not knock or ring doorbell until you have called or texted first & get a response," and not including your phone or text number on that sign.
- If a litigant appears at your door and you answer their call or text, not opening the door, but explaining that they must contact the office.
- Keeping a cellular telephone close at hand and/or by your bed.
- Using security lighting at your home.
- Installing deadbolt locks on doors and bars at basement windows.

- Barring any glass panel next to your front door.
- Living in a gated community or at the end of a street or cul-de-sac.
- Not using your name on your mailbox or lamppost.
- Having dogs and/or posting “Beware of the Dog” signs.
- Listening to your pet birds, who are typically hypersensitive to the sounds of strangers.

Mail and Newspaper Safety

- Using the judge's office address or a post office box on accounts, on your driver's license, and for all mail.
- Never opening suspicious packages.
- Calling law enforcement or the U.S. Postal Service if packages or letters arrive with grease marks or no return address.
- Calling the U.S. Postal Service for speakers or a flier describing bombs in the mail.
- When going out of town, making arrangements with others to have your mail and newspapers secured.

Communication Ideas

- Addressing people with a tone of respect and humility rather than anger or sarcasm.
- Using a home telephone answering machine to screen calls.
- Not announcing your name and phone number on the outgoing message of your home answering machine.
- Never providing personal information to anyone, whether in person or by Internet, regarding when, where, and times that family members are to arrive. Not announcing to the public that you are going out of town for vacation, a conference, family matters, or business. In public, discussing ideas or past activities rather than future activities with friends, barber, hairdresser, repairmen, and others. Letting your friends and extended family know your travel plans are confidential.
- Minimizing the number of people having knowledge that your family is connected with the judiciary. If asked, consider identifying yourself or your spouse as an attorney, government employee, etc.
- Not allowing strangers to overhear your personal telephone calls.
- If you discover vandalism to your home, calling law enforcement directly, always keeping that

number handy in your phones. Avoiding calling 911 or other switchboards broadcast on citizen's band radios. One family reports their call to 911 reached journalists who rushed to their home and later published their address in the newspaper.

Travel and Vehicle Techniques

- Traveling with a cell phone. Making sure battery is fully charged.
- Carrying the telephone numbers of both local and state or territory police with you and calling if a crisis should occur. They typically would show you the same care as if you were part of their own family.
- When you're in your automobile, keeping the doors locked at all times.
- Varying your travel routes and times for shopping, work, school, etc.
- Keeping your name off assigned parking spaces at home and at work.
- Avoiding going alone to events or on trips.
- Before entering your vehicle, being sure there are not bombs behind the wheels, tampering with the hood, or any signs of hidden persons inside the car. One judge routinely checks a string tied on the hood and car doors to assure no one has broken in.
- If you sense someone is following you, going directly to the nearest police station or keeping driving until the car behind you turns.
- Being sure your gasoline tank is filled in case unexpected driving is necessary.
- Avoiding being paranoid, but being aware if someone is staring at you or following you in a place other than the courthouse.
- Avoiding personalized license plates or distinguishing plates on vehicles. Some people feel safer with distinguishing plates, but the Indiana State Police think that makes you a target.
- Parking in well-lighted areas.
- When leaving a shopping center, before leaving a store, if your vehicle is not equipped with automatic proximity unlocking and ignition, having key in hand and ready to insert rather than fumbling for it at the car.
- Seeing tips on the JFI website on protecting yourself from mass shooters in public.
- When involved in a minor property damage vehicle crash, using your cell phone to call law enforcement, but without identifying yourself as a judge or judge's family member.

- If in a minor car crash, requesting that the driver of the other vehicle follow you to a well-lighted area to exchange pertinent information.
- If you are traveling without speeding on an isolated country road at night and an unmarked car with a flashing light attempts to stop you, without identifying yourself as a judge or judge's family member, use your cell phone to call the police station to confirm that they use an unmarked car. If not, tell them your location.
- Not transporting your judicial robe in your automobile by hanging it up unless it is covered with colored paper, plastic, [or fabric carrier] to disguise it. If not covered, laying it flat in your back seat or trunk.
- Avoiding becoming physically involved in the subduing, chase, or apprehension of disorderly persons or escapees.
- When out of town for a long period of time, making arrangements with someone to move your vehicles to a different location.
- Letting law enforcement know when you and your family are out of town.
- Not leaving your luggage unattended anywhere.
- Avoiding using your full name and title or home address visibly on luggage tags.

Media Contact

- Getting acquainted with reporters who routinely cover your courts and requesting they keep your home address private for security reasons.
- Encouraging media to avoid showing photographs of your family or your residence after there has been an incident of court-related news or violence. Investing time to get acquainted with media personnel will help them understand your concerns.
- Avoiding being quoted in the news in such a manner as to make the public think you fear violence or that you think you are not at risk. Such quotes can be taken either as an invitation or as a challenge.
- Not allowing the media to learn the names, ages, or schools of your minor children.
- Not telling the news media the security you have in place.
- If feasible, not upgrading any photographs that may be on file with the news media or the government. One exception is the photograph tied to a confidentially maintained official "Personal and Family Information Sheet."

Service Calls

- Always verifying the legitimacy and reputation of individuals planning to perform any work at your residence.
- Always requiring identification from individuals performing work at your home.

Campaigning Precautions

- Arranging for security at parades, dinners, and events.
- Taking someone along for door-to-door campaigning.
- Avoiding use of your residence address on any campaign materials.
- Avoiding riding in parades unless there are provisions made for security and crowd control.
- Considering control of event admission by invitation or limited ticket sales or distribution.
- Not personally posting or removing your campaign signs if you can have someone else do it for you.
- Limiting your campaign signs at your residence or bumper stickers on your personal vehicles.

Ways of Handling Threats

- Reporting any threats to your law enforcement security provider. Studies suggest some people making threats are trying to get attention and will escalate their activities if disregarded. Law enforcement may be trained to discern between mere ventilation and a true concern.
- Taking self-defense courses.
- Assigning divorce and custody cases to mediation. Litigants who reach their own conclusions on family money and custody tend not to retaliate against the judge or the judge's family.
- Leaving the children with someone you trust for a few days.
- Using telephone "caller identification" or asking the telephone company or law enforcement to have suspicious calls traced.
- Questioning whether attempts to assassinate prominent figures correlate with threats. Visiting <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>, the National Institute of Justice website to obtain an electronic version of Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations or calling (800) 851-3420.

- Not sounding intimidated. One spouse responds to telephone threats with humor: “I don’t take that type of call here at home, you’ll have to call the office at 999-9999.”
- Acting like you’re crazy if someone who seems to want to harm you approaches you.
- Removing any mailing labels containing your name and home address from subscription magazines before taking them to the courthouse or home recycling bin.
- Displaying photographs of your family in your office facing you, where visitors cannot see them.
- Avoiding use of the title “Judge” on personal checks, credit cards, airline tickets, etc.
- Requesting that your name not be included in the city directory.
- Asking federal census takers to exclude your social security number and other relevant information from published lists if possible.

Information Management

- Checking your newest state or territory laws on how to avoid having your home address on the Internet.
- Seeing the newest Judicial Family Institute (JFI) website articles on cybersecurity.
- For Internet safety for adults and children seeing *Protect Your Personal Privacy* and other articles on the JFI website.
- Having an unlisted or unpublished telephone number and address.
- If you must put your telephone number in a directory of any kind, excluding your address.
- Having all bills and credit card accounts sent to the office or a post office box.
- Avoiding use of the home address on driver’s license, checkbook, return address, and telephone book. Some use a post office box or office address.
- Shredding identifying personal papers.

Public Contact

- Avoiding placing your child’s name boldly on the exterior of personal clothing when feasible.
- Avoiding becoming intoxicated in public places, therefore becoming vulnerable.
- Avoiding wearing shirts or caps that identify you as a judge when you’re out in public. “Have Gavel will Travel,” “Take the Law into Your Own Hands, Hug a Judge,” “Here Comes the Judge,” etc. may be okay for around the home or while attending judicial events, but may be too risky elsewhere.

A Home and Travel Security Guide was originally published under a different title within *An Ethics Guide for Judges and Their Families* published by the Center for Judicial Ethics headed by Director Cynthia Gray. The security and family life sections of the guide were compiled by Judicial Family Institute (JFI) board members and an advisory board from around the U.S.A. that included an appellate and 3 trial judges, 2 spouses of appellate judges active in JFI, 2 judicial educators, 2 judicial ethics staff members, and the Director of the former American Judicature Society.

The project was funded by a grant from the State Justice Institute (SJI).

The Center for Judicial Ethics is now part of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and granted permission to post the article, and JFI updates of it, on the Judicial Family Institute (JFI) website.

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See this and other Judicial Family Institute (JFI) articles on security, ethics, avoiding family conflicts of interest, parenting in a high visibility situation, stress management, impairment assistance, and other topics at:

<http://www.judicialfamilyinstitute.org>
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